



The General Factor of Personality: The relationship between the Big One and the Dark Triad



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to explore the relationship between the General Factor of Personality (GFP) – a personality dimension proposed to be at the top of the personality hierarchy, and the Dark Triad personality dimensions – a cluster of three anti-social personality traits, including: Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism. A sample of 359 participants completed a measure of the Big 5 personality factors (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism), a Machiavellianism scale, a measure of narcissism, and a measure of psychopathology. The GFP was extracted using a principal axis factor analysis of the Big Five factor scores. The GFP had significant negative correlations with Machiavellianism and psychopathy, but a non-significant correlation with narcissism. A subset of the sample completed a social desirability measure and partial correlations between the GFP and the Dark Triad, controlling for social desirability, were examined. Although the partial correlations were attenuated, the GFP was still significantly and negatively correlated with Machiavellianism and psychopathy and the non-significant correlation with narcissism remained. The results of this study provide further support for the concept of a meaningful pro-social GFP and for the Dark Dyad model (the exclusion of narcissism from the Dark Triad).

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1. Introduction

The hierarchal taxonomy of personality traits has garnered considerable attention from researchers in the past few decades, and recently the question has been what dimension(s) are at the top of this hierarchy? For many years, most personality researchers have worked with the Five Factor Model (McCrae & Costa, 1987). Recent evidence however, has suggested that the Five Factor Model can be further reduced into one dimension – the General Factor of Personality (GFP), and that it is the GFP that is at the peak of the personality hierarchy (Musek, 2007). Because the GFP is still a recently reported construct, further development in this area of research is required. The present study examines the relationship between the GFP and the Dark Triad personality traits. The vast majority of the extant literature on the GFP has focused primarily on the relationship of this dimension with other socially desirable personality traits; there has been significantly less research correlating the GFP with personality dimensions that are generally perceived as socially malevolent (i.e. Erdle, Irwing, Rushton, & Park, 2010; Musek, 2007; van der Linden, te Nijenhuis, & Bakker, 2010).

1.1. The General Factor of Personality

Though many hierarchal models of personality have been proposed, the one that has received the most attention has been the Five Factor Model (FFM) or the Big Five (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1993). The FFM posits that all individual differences in personality can be explained by five traits: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Goldberg, 1981). Despite the many proponents of the FFM, many researchers questioned the fundamentality of these traits, as there was strong evidence suggesting that they are not orthogonal (Becker, 1999; Block, 1995).

A meta-analysis by Digman (1997) found strong evidence for two superordinate dimensions: Alpha and Beta. Alpha, later renamed Stability, is composed of conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism (or emotional stability), while Beta, renamed Plasticity, is comprised of openness to experience and extraversion (DeYoung, Peterson, & Higgins, 2002). Using factor analyses, Musek (2007) further supported Digman's (1997) two-factor solution, but Musek (2007) also demonstrated that these two higher-order factors were not orthogonal and could be further reduced into one highest-order dimension: the General Factor of Personality (GFP). It is proposed that a person who is rated as high on the GFP is characterized as having a blend of socially desirable personality traits; specifically high extraversion, low neuroticism, high openness to experience, high conscientiousness, as well as high agreeableness (Musek, 2007).

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Further supporting evidence for the GFP was found when researchers employed structural-equation modelling to review the studies in Digman's (1997) meta-analysis in order to find a GFP (Rushton & Irwing, 2008). The results of Digman's (1997) study were replicated by Rushton and Irwing (2008) as Alpha was extracted from conscientiousness, neuroticism, and agreeableness (loadings ranging from 0.61 to 0.70), and Beta was extracted from openness to experience and extraversion (loadings of 0.55 and 0.77). A GFP was extracted from the correlation between Alpha and Beta, which accounted for 45% of the reliable variance. In general, the GFP has been replicated numerous times using various diverse personality and other individual difference measures and across cultures (see review by Just, 2011).

1.2. Criticisms of the GFP

Although the GFP is relatively recent, it has been criticized for various reasons. The most common concern was that the orthogonality of the Big Five appears to depend on the type of information. Biesanz and West (2004) found that single informants tend to result in the Big Five traits being correlated, while diverse informants tend to result in relatively more orthogonal Big Five traits. This would be problematic for the one factor solution because it would mean that a GFP is only possible when measured with self-report scales. This leads to serious questions about the validity of the construct. The reason for this discrepancy is believed to be the result of social desirability bias in self-report measures. This criticism would also explain the relationship of the GFP with socially valued traits and outcomes such as self-esteem (Erdle, Irwing, Rushton, & Park, 2010). This criticism was further substantiated as researchers found that the GFP was strongly correlated with social desirability (Schermer & MacDougall, 2012).

The relationship between the GFP and social desirability has been addressed in a number of studies. Rushton and Erdle (2009) found that the GFP still appeared after statistically controlling for social desirability. More specifically, they found that before controlling for social desirability, the mean Big Five loading on the GFP was .45; this was reduced to .44 after controlling for social desirability. In the same vein, using two samples, Schermer and Vernon (2010) found that the GFP was significantly correlated with social desirability and general intelligence; however, social desirability did not correlate significantly with general intelligence. This indicates that although the GFP is related to social desirability, the GFP cannot be explained by social desirability alone. Further evidence in support of the GFP was found by Rushton and Erdle (2009) who examined multiple informants (self-, teacher-, and parent-ratings) and found that a GFP accounted for 54% of the reliable variance and was found regardless of the source of data.

Although the GFP is related to social desirability response bias, the GFP cannot be sufficiently explained by social desirability alone. There is evidence to suggest that the GFP represents social effectiveness. Using multiple scales to derive a GFP, Loehlin (2012) found that measures such as empathy, sociability, and adjustment had the highest loadings on the GFP. It was also found that the GFP was significantly correlated with frequency of behaviours reflecting communication, friendliness, and creativity. Further evidence supporting this theory is demonstrated by van der Linden, Oostrom, Born, van der Molen, and Serlie (2014) who found that participants who were rated higher on the GFP fared better on social judgement tests, were rated higher on leadership skills by their peers, and demonstrated more social behaviour on webcam tests. Similarly, Dunkel and van der Linden (2014) created composite GFP measures (comprised of four separate personality measures) and a composite social effectiveness measure (comprised of three separate social effectiveness measures). The results indicated that the composite GFP and the composite social effectiveness measures share 66% of their variance and shared 53% of their variance when controlling for social desirability. Although controlling for social desirability did reduce the amount of shared variance between the composite measures, the remaining shared variance supports the social effectiveness

hypothesis (Dunkel & van der Linden, 2014), providing strong evidence that the GFP is a meaningful construct reflecting social competence, rather than a result of response bias.

1.3. The Dark Triad

The Dark Triad is a cluster of three subclinical socially malevolent personality traits, including: Machiavellianism, subclinical psychopathy, and subclinical narcissism. These three traits involve tendencies toward self-promotion, aggressiveness, emotional coldness, and deception. Although these traits are moderately and significantly positively inter-correlated, each trait represents a distinct facet of antisocial personality, and has contrasting correlations with other personality traits (Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

The personality trait of Machiavellianism is characterized by manipulative tendencies and interpersonal coldness that originate from a lack of conventional morality (Christie & Geis, 1970). A psychopathic personality on the other hand, is typified by high impulsivity, thrill-seeking behaviours, low empathy, and anxiety (Hare, 1985). The essence of narcissism is a sense of grandiosity, entitlement, and superiority (Raskin & Hall, 1979).

Paulhus and Williams (2002) found that there is significant overlap between Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism, but despite this fact, they represent three distinct dimensions of socially aversive personality traits. In their study, they found that the Dark Triad variables were differentially correlated with other personality constructs. With regards to the FFM, the only commonality found across all three dimensions was low agreeableness. Vernon, Villani, Vickers, and Harris (2008) conducted a behavioural genetic study examining the relationship of the Dark Triad and the Big Five personality dimensions. These researchers found differential phenotypic correlations between the Dark Triad variables and the Big Five. More specifically, Machiavellianism had a significant positive correlation with neuroticism, and significant negative correlations with agreeableness and conscientiousness. Psychopathy had significant negative correlations with agreeableness and conscientiousness. Narcissism had a significant positive correlation with extraversion, and a significant negative correlation with agreeableness.

Petrides, Vernon, Schermer, and Veselka (2011) examined the relationship between the Dark Triad and trait emotional intelligence further demonstrating the distinctiveness of the Dark Triad traits. Machiavellianism had significant negative correlations with emotionality, self-control, well-being, and global trait emotional intelligence. Psychopathy had significant negative correlations with emotionality, self-control, well-being, and global trait emotional intelligence. Narcissism had positive significant correlations with sociability, well-being, and global trait emotional intelligence, and was the only one of the dark traits to be related to positive personality dimensions, suggesting the possibility that narcissism might be excluded from the malevolent personality cluster.

Egan, Chan, and Shorter (2014) examined positive psychological states in the differentiation relative to the Dark Triad and general personality traits. Using structural equation modelling, Egan, Chan, and Shorter (2014) found that the best fitting model for their data consisted of the "Dark Dyad" (Machiavellianism and psychopathy), and a separate correlated narcissism. In other words, even though narcissism has some negative connotations, it differs from the other two dark variables as it has positive and prosocial aspects (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2012). One of the aims of the present study is to examine this Dark Dyad hypothesis in relation to the socially positive GFP.

1.4. Present study

The purpose of this study was to examine the correlation between the GFP, described as a prosocial personality dimension, in relation to the Dark Triad. This contributes to the discussion regarding the exclusion of narcissism from the Dark Triad. Previous evidence has suggested

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